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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: MOROCCO: KING WITHDRAWS RESERVATIONS TO UN WOMEN'S CONVENTION

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: In what is being hailed as an important symbolic step, King Mohammed VI announced in a December 10 speech that Morocco will lift its remaining and outdated reservations to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The objections covered conferral of nationality, equity in marriage and family issues which have been superseded by Moroccan law. Although domestic legal procedures must be followed before the reservations can be formally withdrawn at the UN, Government of Morocco interlocutors predict smooth and quick internal ratification of the announcement. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 10, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in a speech delivered in his name by Royal Counselor for Legal Affairs Mohammed Moatissim, King Mohammed VI highlighted Moroccan progress in the field of human rights. In the remarks, the King announced that Morocco will lift its reservations against the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). (Note: Morocco ratified the CEDAW in 1993. End Note.) "Given the advanced legislation adopted by our country," the King said, "the reservations are now obsolete."

¶3. (SBU) Morocco's first reservation addressed the second paragraph of article 9 of the CEDAW which stipulates that "the States grant a woman equal rights to those of a man with regard to the nationality of their children." As a result of amendments made to the Family Code in 2004 and the Nationality Code in 2006, Morocco's objections to article 9 are illegal under its own laws. Its second reservation relating to article 16 and the requirement for equity in marriage and family relations has similarly been overtaken by developments in Moroccan law and jurisprudence. Morocco will also lift its reservation to article 29 relating to modes of arbitration between the signatory states.

¶4. (SBU) Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Director of Humanitarian and Social Issues Abdelmounaim El Farrouk told PolFsn that the GOM lodged the reservations in 1993 when it first acceded to the CEDAW. Farrouk explained that, although the King made public his intent to rescind the GOM's objections, certain standard procedures must be followed to gain pro forma Ministry of Justice concurrence, including the official publication of the decision, before the UN can be officially informed of the reservations, withdrawal. Farrouk did not, however, anticipate significant delays or problems with the process.

¶5. (SBU) Media reported that many women's rights NGOs praised the King's decision, describing it as a sign of growing recognition of full-fledged equality between men and

women. Chairman of the Moroccan Organization of Human Rights, Amina Bouayach, told the press that the decision would have a positive effect on the drafting of national laws and gender-related government decisions and programs. National coordinator of women's association Joussour, Ghizlane Benyaich, publicly commended the announcement but stressed that it should be coupled with domestic mechanisms to ensure actual enforcement of CEDAW provisions in Morocco. Chairwoman of the Women's Action Union Nezha Alaoui told PolFsn that it was an important symbolic step towards establishing true gender equality.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: Since most of the issues covered by the reservations have been addressed by current legislation, the rescinding will not have a concrete effect. However, the action has important symbolic value as a message to segments of society still resistant to reform. Women's NGOs are particularly hopeful that the fact that King himself carried the message will spark improvements in local government and judicial sector handling of women's issues. This underscores the continuing, if incremental, progress on gender equality also addressed in Casablanca septel on violence against women. End Comment

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